

11/18/22 Friday

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Here We Go Again: Chaos in Israel as Chances of Netanyahu Forming Government Appear Dim

By - Fantine Gardinier

Amid Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu's pursuit of returning to Israel's prime ministry, he has courted some of the most extreme right-wing groups that are legal in Israeli politics. However, Bibi's dream may soon collapse amid the intransigent demands by two of the smaller parties in the coalition.

Netanyahu is facing a tough challenge from Religious Zionism chair Bezalel Smotrich and Otzma Yehudit head Itamar Ben-Gvir, with both men issuing heavy demands for portfolio assignments in his would-be government. According to Israeli media, many fear the prime minister-designate won't be able to form a government by the deadline of next Wednesday. Smotrich has demanded to be made defense minister and Ben-Gvir wants to be minister of transport, education, and the police. Their votes are a key part of Netanyahu's thin majority: if they pull their support, the chances of him being able to find a new majority are slim. According to reports in Israeli media on Friday, Likud has offered Smotrich the foreign affairs ministry, which he declined, and the finance ministry, albeit without some of its responsibilities. "Smotrich's demand for the defense portfolio is a legitimate demand that will allow the realization of full right-wing policies, the establishment of new settlements in Judea and Samaria, the approval of thousands of apartment units, ending [Palestinian] construction in Area C, and stopping the evacuation of [outposts]," Otzma Yehudit said in a statement.

At least part of Netanyahu's hesitancy is likely due to American complaints about Smotrich being included in the coalition. According to media reports, Netanyahu told Smotrich that Israel must maintain a moderate policy while the Biden administration remains in office, as Washington has taken a stronger stance against Jewish settlement in the West Bank than previous administrations and opposed Israeli concerns internationally.

Ben-Gvir is expected to become Minister of Public Security, but there was no word about Bibi meeting his other demands. He has said he would only enter a government if Smotrich does as well, as the two ran together on a joint list.

However, Ben-Gvir said on Friday he now wants to separate Otzma Yehudit from Religious Zionism, forming a separate party in the Knesset.

Netanyahu was asked to form a government following a [major right-wing victory](#) in the Knesset elections earlier this month. While he was prime minister from 2009 until 2021, the later years of his government were beset with infighting and instability, with several elections being called as governments formed and fell apart.

A diverse coalition of parties came together in June 2021 after Yair Lapid, Netanyahu's rival and the leader of the centrist Yesh Atid party, was [asked to form a government](#) instead. That

coalition also proved unstable, as its only uniting principle was avoiding a new Netanyahu government.

Netanyahu is still facing [an ongoing trial](#) over corruption accusations against him, which helped destroy confidence in his previous administration.

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'Most Ridiculous Idea': Ex-US Treasury Secretary Mnuchin Dismisses G7 Price Cap on Russian Oil

By - Fantine Gardinier

The Biden administration is pushing other nations to adopt an arbitrary price cap on Russian energy exports as its latest effort to undermine Moscow. However, many economists are skeptical of the effort for its anti-market nature, especially in such a volatile and essential field. The latest figure to speak out against the proposed price cap is former US Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin, who said on Friday that the idea was “not only not feasible, I think it’s the most ridiculous idea I’ve ever heard.”

However, Mnuchin, who under former US President Donald Trump managed [the sanctions regimes](#) imposed on nations from Venezuela to Iran, said they could have had “a big impact” on Moscow’s thinking if they had been imposed before the start of the special operation in Ukraine in February 2022.

“I think the problem now is that there’s limited options ... there’s parts of the world that are now buying Russian oil outside of US sanctions,” he said. “But look, a price cap, the market is going to set the price. So if you put sanctions on at higher prices, in a way you’re just making the situation worse, in my opinion.”

Mnuchin’s comments come after [reports that the Group of Seven](#) (G7) agreed on a price cap at an emergency meeting this week, called after a missile struck a Polish town on the Ukrainian border, killing two people. While initial reports suggested it could have been a Russian weapon, Warsaw and Washington both later said it was most likely an errant Ukrainian S-300 air defense missile.

However, the topic has been debated [for weeks](#), as Europe struggles to comply with American demands for a total boycott of Russian energy exports and winter nears. According to the plan, trade necessities such as insurance, financing, and access to maritime routes would be withheld from Russian sellers unless the petroleum product was sold at or below a price selected and fixed by Western nations.

The US boycott has helped push up the price of oil and gas around the globe, which has had the opposite of its intended effect, buttressing Russian profits as Moscow shifts from Europe to new buyers in Asia instead of losing out on sales altogether. The price cap is seen as an attempt to undermine this new advantage and at the same time bring down prices worldwide, which are helping to drive record-high inflation.

For nations that depend heavily on importing Russian gas and oil, such as India, the price cap could be catastrophic, although the present US Treasury Secretary, Janet Yellen, has tried to

convince New Delhi that the cap would yield “bargain prices.” That is assuming, of course, that Russia decides to sell oil at the capped price - as it did in September, when the European Union imposed a price cap on Russia gas, resulting in a shutoff of the Nord Stream 1 pipeline.

Choosing to ignore the price cap, however, brings its own price: potentially being [cut off from Western resources](#).

The G7 reportedly plans to have the price cap in operation on December 5, when the EU's ban on Russian crude oil imports begins. The Brussels-based bloc will ban all other Russian oil products after February 5, 2023.

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Pentagon's Chaotic Inventory Failed to Accurately Track US Weapons Given to Kabul, SIGAR Says

By - Fantine Gardinier

A new report has revealed that much of the weapons inventory shipped to Afghanistan was never properly cataloged by the Pentagon, meaning the US military has no idea how much weaponry it inadvertently supply to the Taliban* when it abandoned the country last year.

According to [a new report](#) by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), a Pentagon watchdog focused on the [US' war in Afghanistan](#) that ended last year, the Pentagon has only provided “limited, inaccurate, and untimely information about the defense articles it left behind.”

“[A]lthough DOD reported [\\$7.1 billion in equipment left](#) in Afghanistan that was previously provided to the Afghanistan government and the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF), the department has struggled for years with accurately accounting for the equipment it provided to the ANDSF,” the SIGAR report stated. “Since at least 2009, SIGAR and the DOD Office of Inspector General (DOD IG) have published reports noting accountability shortfalls and issues with DOD’s processes for tracking equipment in Afghanistan.”

The report goes on, stating that the US Department of Defense (DOD) “did not meet its own oversight requirements for sensitive equipment transferred to the Afghan government and ANDSF, and had not inventoried 60% of defense articles with enhanced monitoring requirements - those containing sensitive technology - between May 2019 and April 2020 due to security constraints and travel limitations.”

In other words, the US government doesn’t really know which equipment, or how much of it, was left behind in Afghanistan, but it was at least \$7.1 billion worth.

The DOD IG [report from August](#) noted that at the time of the fall of the government, the ANDSF had in its stocks some 316,000 small arms supplied by the US since 2005.

That report also noted longstanding and well-known problems with the Core Inventory Management System used to catalog stocks at bases in Afghanistan, including a chaotic system of Microsoft Excel spreadsheets and even handwritten inventories used to get around the problem that many of the bases either did not have internet access or didn’t have electricity of any type.

SIGAR did note that at least 70 Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) tactical vehicles and 80 aircraft were “rendered inoperable” in what it called “ad-hoc demilitarization efforts” at Hamid Karzai International Airport in August 2021, the point of egress for US forces and their collaborators in the final weeks of the withdrawal.

That withdrawal was chaotic and disastrous, with the US-backed Afghan government failing to hold power against [a Taliban assault](#) even long enough for US forces to complete their withdrawal from the country. In the last two weeks of August, US forces forged an uneasy relationship with Taliban fighters after the latter seized Kabul without a fight, working to provide security for tens of thousands of would-be refugees rushing to the airport in an attempt to leave with the departing US troops.

SIGAR had [long raised concerns](#) about the ability of the ANDSF to operate on its own, and documented the major problems with corruption in the Afghan military and government, as well as among US forces in the country.

The withdrawal, agreed to in 2020 by then-US President Donald Trump as part of a ceasefire with the Taliban, was completed by US President Joe Biden by August 31, 2021. However, it was [long opposed by Pentagon brass](#), who did not believe the US-backed government could survive.

After the Taliban seized power, the US and much of the world severed relations and refused to recognize their new government, causing [a complete collapse](#) of the already-fragile Afghan economy and a major humanitarian crisis.

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‘Pisses Me Off’: Taylor Swift Slams Ticketmaster for Sales Bungle as Reports Swirl of DOJ Probe

By - Fantine Gardinier

Singer Taylor Swift dug into ticket-selling giant Ticketmaster on Friday after the company bailed on selling tickets to her forthcoming music tour. Meanwhile, rumors are swirling that the US Department of Justice (DOJ) has opened a new probe of Ticketmaster’s parent company, Live Nation Entertainment.

On Thursday, [Ticketmaster suddenly announced](#) that because of “extraordinarily high demands on ticketing systems and insufficient remaining ticket inventory to meet that demand,” sales for concerts on Swift’s “The Eras” tour would be canceled. The company did not say when they might be rescheduled for.

The decision came after a mixture of unexpectedly large numbers of fans and bot attacks combined to overload the ticket pre-sale event earlier that week, which was intended to be restricted to “Verified Fans” with a special code.

Swift responded to Ticketmaster’s decision with grace in a Friday statement posted to her Instagram* account.

“Well it goes without saying that I’m extremely protective of my fans,” the singer said. “We’ve been doing this for decades together and over the years, I’ve brought so many elements of my

career in house. I've done this SPECIFICALLY to improve the quality of my fans' experience by doing it myself with my team who care as much about my fans as I do. It's really difficult for me to trust an outside entity with these relationships and loyalties, and excruciating for me to just watch mistakes happen with no recourse."

"There are a multitude of reasons why people had such a hard time trying to get tickets and I'm trying to figure out how this situation can be improved moving forward," Swift said. "I'm not going to make excuses for anyone because we asked them, multiple times, if they could handle this kind of demand and we were assured they could. It's truly amazing that 2.4 million people got tickets, but it really pisses me off that a lot of them feel like they went through several bear attacks to get them."

Also on Friday, US media reported that the DOJ's antitrust bureau had opened a new investigation of Live Nation Entertainment, Ticketmaster's parent company, for suspected monopoly practices.

When the two companies merged in 2010, it prompted fears of monopolization of the industry, but even though the US Senate's Judiciary consumer rights subcommittee was informed that Ticketmaster commanded 80% of the ticket sales market prior to the merger, it was allowed to go forward with nothing more than promises from Live Nation not to abuse its position. Accusations of monopoly practices against Ticketmaster predated the merger and only increased after it.

Those calls were renewed earlier this week amid the debacle over Swift's ticket sales, with several US lawmakers urging a new probe. US Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), who chairs the above subcommittee, [wrote directly to Live Nation CEO](#) Michael Rapino, demanding information about its ticket distribution processes and the quality of its computer systems.

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North Korea Fires Suspected Long-Range Ballistic Missile Toward Sea of Japan - S. Korean Military

If confirmed, the early Friday launch would mark the first intercontinental ballistic missile test since May 25, 2022. North Korea last conducted a test-launch on Wednesday that was later identified as a short-range ballistic missile.

North Korea launched a suspected intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) toward the Sea of Japan early Friday, South Korean military has said.

The South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff noted the projectile had been launched from Pyongyang's Sunan area at about 10:15 a.m. local time. The Joint Chiefs further stated that the missile flew about 1,000 kilometers at an altitude of 6,100 kilometers, adding it reached a top speed of about Mach 22.

Japanese officials earlier stated the missile reached a maximum altitude of 6,000 kilometers and traveled a distance of 1,000 kilometers.

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has since said the suspected ICBM landed in Japan's exclusive economic zone, west of the island of Hokkaido. It's believed the projectile was airborne for approximately one hour. No reports of damages have yet surfaced.

Kishida has blasted the incident, telling reporters in Thailand: "We naturally lodged a strong protest against North Korea, which has repeated its provocations with unprecedented frequency."

The Japanese prime minister is in Thailand attending the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit.

Japanese Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada commented on Friday that "if we calculate based on the trajectory of the intercontinental ballistic missile fired by North Korea today, the range could have exceeded 15,000 kilometers, which includes US territory."

Earlier, the Japan Coast Guard issued an alert to aircraft and sea vessels, urging others to refrain from "approaching fragments should they fall, and to inform the coast guard." At the time, the Misawa Air Base also [issued](#) a precautionary seek cover order.

The launch itself comes a day after North Korea fired a short-range ballistic missile toward the Sea of Japan from Wonsan, a port city located in the country's Kangwon Province.

Incidentally, the Wednesday launch also took place as North Korean Foreign Affairs Minister Choe Son Hui warned that Pyongyang would undertake a "fiercer" military action if the US continued to strengthen its "extended deterrence" commitment with allies in the region.

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Report: Twitter Temporarily Closed Buildings, Suspended Badges Over Employee Sabotage Concerns

The South African billionaire sealed his acquisition of the social media platform in late October, months after legal back and forth initiated by the Tesla CEO's concern over bot accounts delayed the purchase.

Both office buildings used by Twitter and badge access granted to the company's employees have been temporarily shuttered over concerns of worker sabotage, a newly surfaced report detailed late Thursday.

Zoë Schiffer, the managing editor of tech-focused outlet Platformer, detailed in a three-part tweet that employees had indicated the building closure and suspension of badges was "effective immediately."

Although it was initially noted that an explanation for the move had not been provided by the company, it was later relayed by firm insiders that the situation partially unfolded because of concerns over the possibility of workers trying to undermine the tech giant.

"We're hearing this is because Elon Musk and his team are terrified employees are going to sabotage the company," Schiffer [wrote](#). "Also, they're still trying to figure out which Twitter workers they need to cut access for."

Twitter's office are expected to reopen on November 21, and until then - per Schiffer - workers are being instructed to "comply with company policy by refraining from discussing confidential company information on social media, with the press or elsewhere."

The latest comes as Twitter employees were faced with a Thursday deadline on whether they would be staying or parting ways with the company after being presented with new staff expectations under newly-installed CEO Elon Musk.

In fact, obtained emails revealed on Wednesday that Musk had called on staffers to either be ready to work longer hours and increase their work output or exit the company with a three-month severance package before the launch of so-called "Twitter 2.0." Employees were told to submit their responses by Thursday.

With the clock ticking away toward the deadline, US media reported that chaos reigned inside Twitter as employees yo-yoed between new, somewhat confusing directives sent out by senior officials.

New emails dispatched to employees indicated that Musk was appearing to soften his "hardcore" work requirements all the while informing company managers that they would be required to hold in-person meetings with employees monthly. However, managers would be fired if they allowed remote work to employees not deemed "exceptional." Details on what constituted "exceptional" work were not outlined in the correspondence.

The new emails also reportedly came as resignations began to trickle, eventually being submitted to Musk by the "hundreds."

The uncertainty of Twitter's future operations have been under the spotlight for days, ever since the billionaire entrepreneur effectively laid off 7,500 staffers just over a week after wrapping up his \$44 billion acquisition of the company.

More recently, the firm was blasted after its paid verification system allowed netizens to create spoof accounts of celebrities, historical figures and politicians, among other figures. After a period of hours, the system was placed under a temporary pause.

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Dramatic Footage Captures Moment Truck Collided With LATAM Flight During Takeoff in Peru

The flight had been departing the Peruvian capital of Lima for the South American country's southeastern city of Juliaca. Two deaths were reported among the airports firefighting personnel.

A LATAM airlines flight came to an abrupt fiery halt in Lima, Peru, on Friday after a fire truck collided with the plane as it was preparing to take off from the runway.

A statement released by the airline indicated there had been no fatalities among the boarded passengers and flight staff; however, it was later confirmed by the company that the two individuals who were inside the crashed vehicle were killed.

It's unclear what case the firefighters had been responding to or what failures occurred that allowed the vehicle to come so close to the plane as it was taxiing for takeoff.

Footage of the incident has surfaced on social media, showing varying vantage points of the accident from within the airport and on the tarmac.

One photo released by passenger Enrique Varsi-Rospigliosi appeared to show the aftermath of the collision, with the LATAM aircraft leaning on its right wing and doused in fire retardant spray. Additional videos offered a closer look at the damages sustained as passengers were led away from the scene.

Flights bound for the Jorge Chavez International Airport were ultimately diverted to nearby airports as officials began to assess the situation. The Lima Airport Partners stated that operations at the airport would be temporarily suspended until 1 p.m. local time on Saturday. An investigation into the incident is ongoing. The prosecutor's office has indicated it is also looking into whether the case will take a possible murder or bodily injury angle.

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Epstein Docs Ordered Unsealed by Federal Judge Reveal Names of Anonymous 'John Does'
By - Ian DeMartino

Jeffery Epstein and his long-time confidant and one-time girlfriend Ghislaine Maxwell were accused of running a global sex-trafficking ring. Maxwell was convicted in 2021; however, Epstein died before he could stand trial.

Dozens of documents related to associates of the disgraced late pedophile Jeffery Epstein and convicted sex trafficker Ghislaine Maxwell have been ordered unsealed on Friday after a [federal judge ruled](#) the public interest outweighed the right to privacy in many of the cases.

The documents ordered unsealed include information relating to Emmy Tayler, a British woman who was Maxwell's personal assistant and was accused of participating in the sexual abuse of minors.

Tayler denies any wrongdoing while acting as Maxwell's assistant.

Another high-profile name known to be listed in the documents set for release is Tom Pritzker, billionaire executive chairman of Hyatt Hotels.

Pritzker fought the release of the documents, saying it would hurt his reputation. However, Judge Loretta Preska said there was "no basis" for the documents to remain under seal, noting he was just a fleeting mention.

While Preska did deny Pritzker's objections, she did make concessions for other individuals identified as a "John Doe." The designation is given to parties in a legal action who are intended to remain anonymous.

In total, sixteen "non-party Does" have objected to the release of the documents. Eight of those have already been dealt with in a court in New York. Does 12, 28, 97, 107, 144, 147, 171, and 183 are mentioned in this upcoming release.

Doe 12 will remain sealed because Preska says the individual is "peripheral" to the events and they are neither a victim nor an associate of Epstein or Maxwell.

Doe 28 will remain sealed because that individual is a victim of sexual assault. However, Doe 147 was identified as Sarah Ransome. Documents related to her will be unsealed. Preska

stated that was because, although she is a victim, she testified publicly at Maxwell's trial. She also published a book and authored an op-ed that ran in the Washington Post.

Doe 183 will be released because their experience was already the subject of media coverage during the Maxwell trial. However, Preska is delaying that release until November 28 to give Doe 183 time to appeal if they desire.

Doe 107 asked their documents remain sealed but Judge Preska denied them, saying the public's right to access the information outweighs their concerns over privacy. She also noted the documents were "not particularly salacious."

The documents come from a defamation case against Maxwell by Virginia Roberts Giuffre in 2016. That case was eventually settled out of court. Giuffre has been at the center of the Epstein and Maxwell cases and accused Prince Andrew of raping her when she was 17 years old. That case was also settled out of court.

Documents from the Maxwell defamation case have been coming out in batches. The first set was released in 2019, just two days before Epstein was found dead in his jail cell. His death was ruled a suicide. Maxwell did not oppose the release of this batch as she did previously.

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Theranos Founder Elizabeth Holmes Given 11.25 Years in Prison for Scamming Investors
By - Ian DeMartino

Holmes founded Theranos in 2003 and claimed that its technology would revolutionize the way blood testing is done. It claimed to be able to detect a wide variety of diseases using only a few drops of blood. By 2014, the company was valued at \$9 billion.

Elizabeth Holmes, the disgraced CEO of Theranos has been sentenced to more than 11 years in prison for defrauding investors.

The company claimed to have developed a method that would revolutionize blood testing, but the technology never worked.

The sentence was lighter than the 15 years requested by prosecutors but was stiffer than what her defense team has asked for. Holmes' lawyers were pushing for no more than 18 months in prison with additional home confinement and community service.

In January, Holmes was found guilty of four charges: conspiracy against Theranos investors, wire fraud against Theranos investors, and two additional counts of wire fraud.

US District Judge Edward Davila oversaw the monthslong trial and gave Holmes 14 days to appeal her conviction. He ordered her to surrender herself on April 27, 2023. That date will likely be after Holmes delivers her second baby. Holmes also has a one-year-old child.

The judge did not mention her pregnancy during sentencing and her lawyers did not bring it up, but at least one of the 130 letters from her friends and family asking for leniency did mention her pregnancy, including from her current partner, William Evans.

Holmes' lawyer Kevin Downey will request that she remain free on bail while the appeal is pending. He has declined further comment on the sentencing.

Theranos' rise was quick and Holmes found herself on the cover of business magazines and being compared to the likes of Steve Jobs and Bill Gates. That came to an end in 2015 after revelations that the machines were only able to perform a dozen tests and Theranos was utilizing other companies' equipment to test blood. That led to charges being filed against Holmes and Theranos CEO Ramesh Balwani in 2018. Theranos folded soon after. Holmes' story has been the subject of an HBO documentary and a Hulu series that chronicles her rise and fall.

Some of Theranos' investors included Larry Ellison, Rupert Murdoch, and the Walton family. Prosecutors also asked for Holmes to pay \$804 million in restitution, which would have covered most of the \$1 billion that the company raised from investors. Judge Edward Davila said the court would set another date for a hearing on restitution.

Holmes' lawyers argue that the legal battles have left her broke and she is unlikely to be able to pay any restitution. They also note that she never sold any of her stock in Theranos.

A former employee of Theranos, Brad Arington, who was the company's former privacy officer, said that the sentencing gives some closure. "There is a sense that she is finally being held accountable," Arington told the [Wall Street Journal](#). "For many of us, there is some sense of closure because of that accountability."

Arington also claimed that former Theranos employees have suffered professionally and personally as a result of Holmes' actions.

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AG Garland Appoints Special Counsel to Investigate Trump on Mar-a-Lago Docs, Capitol Riot
By - Ian DeMartino

Trump and his allies are under two federal investigations, for allegedly mishandling classified documents and for alleged attempts to disrupt or overturn the peaceful transfer of power following the 2020 Presidential election.

US Attorney General Merrick Garland has appointed Jack Smith as special counsel to oversee investigations relating to former President Donald Trump and his allies. Garland announced [the appointment](#) during a Friday news conference.

Smith will oversee investigations into Trump's handling of classified and other presidential documents and the possible obstruction of that case. He will also be in charge of the ongoing probe into possible interference in the 2020 election and the certification of the electoral vote. Garland did not shy away from the reason he is appointing the special counsel, stating it is partially a result of Trump's Tuesday announcement that he is running for president in 2024. "Based on recent developments, including the former president's announcement that he is a candidate in the next election and the sitting president's stated intentions to be a candidate as well," Garland explained. "I have concluded that it is in the public interest to appoint a special counsel."

Investigations and prosecutions of individuals who were physically present at the Capitol riots will remain under the jurisdiction of the District of Columbia's attorney general.

Smith started his prosecutorial career in 1994 as an assistant district attorney in New York. In 2010, he became the chief of the Public Integrity section of the Justice Department where he oversaw public corruption cases and election crimes. Prior to his appointment, Smith worked as the chief prosecutor for the special court in The Hague, where he prosecuted war crimes in Kosovo.

In a statement, Smith said he would carry out his duties "independently and in the best traditions of the Department of Justice."

"Such an appointment underscores the Department's commitment to both independence and accountability in particularly sensitive matters," Garland told reporters. "It also allows prosecutors and agents to continue their work expeditiously and to make decisions indisputably guided only by the facts and the law."

Shortly after news broke on the development, Trump slammed Garland's decision, stressing he would not "partake" in the "unfair" twin probes.

"I have been going through this for six years — for six years I have been going through this, and I am not going to go through it anymore," Trump said in an exclusive Fox News Digital interview. "And I hope the Republicans have the courage to fight this."

"It is not acceptable. It is so unfair. It is so political," he continued, adding that "it is not even believable that they're allowed to do this. This is the worst politicization of justice in our country." The White House has indicated that Biden was not given an advanced notice of Garland's decision on the matter.

Although both Smith and Garland said the appointment would not slow down the investigations, it remains unclear how the special counsel assignment might change the pace of the probes, which had already been proceeding vigorously.

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Secret US Military Space Drone Returns to Earth After Record Two And A Half Years in Orbit
By - Wyatt Reed

The US military's autonomous space drone, long shrouded in mystery, returned to Earth this weekend following what Boeing described as a record-breaking flight.

The US military's secretive X-37B space drone touched down on Saturday following a nearly two and a half year deployment, Boeing announced this week. The 908 days in orbit was a record for the spacecraft, reportedly exceeding its previous longest streak by around four months.

A [news release](#) published by the manufacturer of the autonomous drone widely suspected to be involved in intelligence collection indicates its payload this time "included a solar energy experiment designed by the Naval Research Lab, as well as a satellite designed and built by cadets at the US Air Force Academy" – a reference to the so-called "FalconSat-8," a small satellite reportedly intended to test an electromagnetic propulsion system.

Another experiment supposedly undertaken by equipment onboard the X-37B includes technology intended to deliver solar power to the ground from space via microwave energy working by radio frequency.

Per Defense News, a livestream of the 2020 launch "[cut out](#)" following the "separation of the rocket's first stage" from the rest of the craft, "due to the extreme secrecy surrounding the capabilities of the X-37B."

"It's a classified mission, and what is classified about it is the details of the vehicle itself, the mission it will do on orbit and where it will do that," explained Tony Bruno, the CEO of United Launch Alliance, the spacecraft launch service jointly owned by Lockheed Martin and Boeing. "Therefore we have to stop the live broadcast so that we do not make it easy for adversaries to figure those things out by having that much data about the flight and deployment," he reportedly told the outlet at the time.

The mystery project saw its sixth and most recent mission begin on May 17, 2020.

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Italian Police Foil Deadly Plot by Neo-Nazis Linked to Ukraine's Azov Battalion
By - Wyatt Reed

The alleged plot to destroy various Italian targets — including a police station — appears to be the first attempted terror attack in Western Europe linked to Ukraine's official Nazi military formations.

Police in Italy arrested four suspected neo-Nazis with links to Ukraine's notorious Azov Battalion who were accused of plotting to carry out "violent acts" against both civilians and police, according to local media.

Photos released by police show the Nazi paraphernalia seized in around 30 raids on members of the "Order of Hagal" throughout the country included photos of Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler, Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, and t-shirts bearing the logo of Ukraine's official Nazi regiment, the Azov Battalion.

"According to the investigators, the objective identified by the members of the Order of Hagal was the Marigliano [police] barracks," Italian outlet Today Chronicle [wrote Tuesday](#). According to the Italian publication, one of the suspects wanted by police "disappeared" before he could be apprehended — a 27-year-old Ukrainian national named Anton Radomosky, who the outlet reported "would have offered his 'intermediation' between the Order of Hagal and neo-Nazi groups such as the Azov Battalion," which they note "is particularly active in the context of the War in Donbass."

Information published by ANSA, Italy's leading news agency, [indicates](#) that Radomosky "is currently in Ukraine, and the investigation showed that he was in contact with the Azov Battalion."

According to another Italian source, the "Ukrainian accomplice... wanted to cause an explosion in a shopping center." Corriere Del Mezzogiorno indicated "the cell had contacts" with not only

“Ukrainian ultranationalist formations such as the Azov Battalion,” [but also](#) the notorious Ukrainian “Right Sector” nazi militia.

The EU and Interpol have been fretting for months about the likelihood that weapons being shipped to Ukraine amid NATO’s proxy war on Russia will end up in criminal hands. As Interpol chief Jurgen Stock [explained](#) in early June, “Once the guns fall silent [in Ukraine], the illegal weapons will come. We know this from many other theaters of conflict. The criminals are even now, as we speak, focusing on them.”

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Israeli PM Incensed as US Authorizes Probe Into Likely IDF Killing of Palestinian-American Reporter

By - Wyatt Reed

The spat between the US and Israel over the former’s insistence in investigating Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh’s killing is already being hailed as a “watershed moment” by Israeli outlet Harretz.

Israel has issued a stern rebuke to the United States after it was reported that the US government is opening an investigation into the killing of Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh.

“IDF soldiers will not be interrogated by the FBI or by any foreign body or foreign country, no matter how friendly,” Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid [insisted](#). “We will not abandon IDF soldiers to foreign investigations, and our strong protest has been conveyed to the Americans at the appropriate levels,” he continued.

“The IDF is a moral and values-based army. IDF soldiers and commanders defend the State of Israel, thoroughly investigate every aberrant incident, and are committed to the values of democracy and its laws.”

Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz earlier stated: “I will not allow an IDF soldier that was protecting himself from terrorist fire to be prosecuted just to receive applause from abroad.”

Abu Akleh was killed in the Jenin refugee camp by an armor-piercing round which multiple investigations by international media outlets found to have been shot by the Israeli military. In September, the IDF admitted there was a “high possibility” Abu Akleh was shot by one of their soldiers, but announced they [would not be charging anyone](#) over her death.

The family of the slain journalist, which had campaigned for months for the US to do more to bring attention to her killing, [expressed “encouragement”](#) at the news that the FBI is carrying out an investigation independently of Israeli authorities, calling it “an important step towards accountability” which “gets our family closer to justice for Shireen.”

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Ecuador Fans Chant 'We Want Beer' At World Cup

By - Ian DeMartino

Qatar banned alcohol sales inside the eight stadiums hosting the FIFA World Cup this month, after insisting that beer would be available for fans during the event.

Ecuador fans attending the World Cup let their opinions on Qatar's decision to ban alcohol sales be heard loud and clear at the opening game on Sunday. The Ecuador section of the stadium was heard chanting "queremos cerveza, queremos cerveza!" which translates to English as "We want beer!"

Ecuador defeated Qatar 2-0 on the back of two first-half scores by veteran striker Enner Valencia. It was the first time a host nation lost its opening-game match in the history of the tournament. Qatar supporters had left the game before its finish, leaving large portions of the stands empty by the final quarter.

Qatar spent more than a decade getting the tiny but rich nation ready to host the World Cup, including building stadiums, hotels, roads, sidewalks, and a new subway system. Local organizers insisted beer would be available for fans but two days before the event started, Qatari officials announced that only non-alcoholic drinks would be available for purchase at the stadium.

Alcohol sales are strictly controlled in Qatar.

The news angered fans, many of whom were unaware of the decision until after their flights landed. Plans regarding alcohol sales changed multiple times during the lead-up to the tournament, indicating that politics or the royal family of Qatar may have played a role in the decision.

FIFA did not say what was behind the change other than to say it was to "ensure that the stadium and surrounding areas provide an enjoyable, respectful and pleasant experience for all fans."

Budweiser, who has long been a sponsor of the World Cup has been working to accommodate the quickly changing plans. Budweiser's non-alcoholic brand, Bud Zero, remains available inside the stadiums.

Budweiser pays FIFA \$75 million for each four-year cycle of the World Cup to be its beer sponsor and have the beverage available at the event.

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Trump Confirms He Will Not Return to Twitter

By - Ian DeMartino

Elon Musk reinstated Trump on Saturday night after a 24-hour poll. His account and previous tweets are now visible but he has not sent any tweets since being reinstated.

Trump [confirmed today](#) that he will not return to Twitter now that his account has been reactivated.

"I don't see any reason for it, they have a lot of problems at Twitter, you see what's going on. It may make it, it may not make it," Trump told the Republican Jewish Coalition during a virtual appearance at their annual leadership meeting.

The statement confirms what he said on his Truth Social account while the poll was active.

"Vote now with positivity, but don't worry, we aren't going anywhere. Truth Social is special!"

Truth Social is a social media site similar to Twitter that was created by Trump Media & Technology Group a few months after Trump was suspended.

Trump's Twitter account was shut down two days after his supporters stormed the US Capitol building on January 6, 2021. At the time, Twitter called the suspension "Permanent."

Before he [purchased Twitter](#) last month, Musk called the suspension a mistake. He indicated that would restore Trump's account when he became the owner of Twitter. After taking control, Musk decided against making the decision unilaterally and instead put it to a poll.

More than 15 million Twitter users voted and Trump's suspension won the poll with 52% of the vote. Trump was reinstated later that night.

Musk spent \$44 billion purchasing Twitter and the first weeks under his control have been chaotic. In his first week as owner, he fired roughly half of Twitter's 7,500 employees. That was followed by another 1,200 staff members resigning after Musk told them to commit to a "hardcore" work environment or leave.

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Facebook Launches Measures to Protect Teenager Privacy on Websites - Statement

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - Facebook (outlawed in Russia as an extremist organization) has initiated new measures to protect the privacy of teenagers under the age of 18 using its websites, including Instagram (also outlawed in Russia), the social media organization announced in a statement on Monday.

"Today, we're sharing an update on how we protect young people from harm and seek to create safe, age-appropriate experiences for teens on Facebook and Instagram," the statement said.

"[E]veryone who is under the age of 16 (or under 18 in certain countries) will be defaulted into more private settings when they join Facebook."

Facebook said that it had already took measures in 2021 to restrict adults from messaging teens they were not connected to or from seeing teens in their People You May Know recommendations.

"In addition to our existing measures, we're now testing ways to protect teens from messaging suspicious adults they aren't connected to, and we won't show them in teens' People You May Know recommendations," the statement said.

As an extra layer of protection, the company is now also testing removing the message button on teens' Instagram accounts when they are viewed by suspicious adults altogether, the statement added.

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Russia, China to Blame for N. Korea Launching 40 Missiles Since May - S. Korea Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, November 21 (Sputnik) - Russia and China are to blame for North Korea test-launching 40 ballistic missiles since May, South Korean Ambassador to the United Nations Hwang Joon-kook said on Monday.

"Since the Security Council failed to adopt a resolution because of the opposition two by permanent members in May, the DPRK [North Korea] has launched forty ballistic missiles and promulgated its new law on nuclear weapon policy," Hwang Joon-kook told the UN Security Council.

The South Korean ambassador said North Korea's new policy sets a far lower threshold than any other country for using nuclear weapons.

At present, North Korea stands on the verge of conducting its seventh ballistic missile nuclear test, he said.

On November 17, North Korea test-launched an unspecified ballistic missile toward the Sea of Japan on Thursday, the Yonhap news agency reported, citing the South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff.

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One Person Dead, Multiple People Injured After Car Plows Through Store in Boston - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - At least one person is dead and multiple other people are injured after an SUV vehicle plowed through a crowded Apple technology store in Boston, Massachusetts, the Patriot Ledger newspaper reported on Monday.

The report said dozens of people are injured and up to four people are trapped inside the Apple store.

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Biden Pardons 2 Turkeys Ahead of Thanksgiving Day Celebrations

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden has pardoned two turkeys at a traditional White House ceremony on Monday ahead of Thanksgiving celebrations this week. The two lucky ones were turkeys named Chocolate and Chip weighing 46 and 47 pounds respectively.

"Chocolate, you are pardoned...Yeah, you are, yeah. I'm serious," Biden said during the ceremony.

Biden added that after being pardoned the turkeys will be taken to one of the great US basketball schools and research universities, North Carolina State University.

Biden also mentioned the results of the past midterm congressional elections in his speech at the ceremony.

"The votes are in... there's no ballot stuffing, there's no 'fowl' play — the only 'red wave' this season is going to be a German Shepherd, Commander, that knocks over the cranberry sauce on our table," Biden said.

The tradition of pardoning turkeys by the President of the United States began with President Lincoln, who first pardoned a turkey in 1863. However, this tradition became annual only during the administration of George H. W. Bush in 1989. Since then, every US president has pardoned turkeys every year in the run-up to Thanksgiving celebrations.

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US Tracking Very Closely Video of Ukrainian Troops Killing Captured Russians - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - The United States is tracking closely the video of Ukrainian troops killing captured Russians and urges Ukraine to abide by its international obligations, the US State Department said on Monday.

"We are tracking that quite closely," the State Department said.

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US Supreme Court Denies Appeal of Case Challenging Texas Redistricting - Order List

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - The US Supreme Court declined the appeal in a case accusing the Texas legislature of redrawing a state Senate district to reduce the political influence of minority voters, according to an order list released by the court on Monday.

The Supreme Court dismissed the appeal in the case over jurisdictional issues, the order list said.

The appeal would have seen the justices review the decision of a federal district court panel to deny an injunction against the redrawn district.

The plaintiffs in the case, a group of Black and Hispanic voters, contend that the district was redrawn by the state legislature in 2021 to reduce their groups' political power. However, the panel found no evidence pointing toward a racial intent behind the redistricting, even if it may disproportionately impact minority voters.

In April, the state Senate district's Democratic incumbent, Beverly Powell, announced that she would not run for re-election in the 2022 midterms due to the impact of the redistricting.

Republican Phil King won the seat during the midterm elections earlier this month.

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Russia Regrets West Ignoring DPRK Calls for US to Cease Hostile Activities—UN Deputy Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, November 21 (Sputnik) – Russia regrets seeing its Western partners consistently ignore North Korea's calls for the United States to cease its hostile activities and start a dialogue, Russian Deputy Representative to the United Nations Anna Evstigneeva said on Monday.

"We deeply regret that our Western colleagues have consistently ignored Pyongyang's repeated calls for the US to cease its hostile activities, which would open up opportunities for dialogue," Evstigneeva said during a UNSC meeting.

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China, Russia Back UNSC Resolution to Mitigate Humanitarian Situation in DPRK – UN Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, November 21 (Sputnik) – China urges members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to consider its joint resolution with Russia on North Korea to mitigate the humanitarian situation in the country and promote a settlement in the region, Chinese Ambassador to the United Nations Zhang Jun said on Monday.

"The DPRK [the Democratic People's Republic of Korea] related draft resolution, jointly sponsored by China and Russia in the Security Council, will help mitigate the humanitarian situation in DPRK, create an atmosphere for dialogue and promote the realization of the regional settlement. We hope that all parties can positively consider it," Zhang said during a UNSC meeting.

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US Blames Russia, China for UNSC Inaction on North Korea - Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, November 21 (Sputnik) - The United States believes that Russia and China are responsible for the UN Security Council's failure to act in response to North Korea's continued missile launches, US Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield said on Monday.

"This is the 10th time that we have met without significant actions. The reason is simple: two veto wielding members of the council are enabling and emboldening the DPRK," Thomas-Greenfield told Security Council members.

She also said Russia and China's "obstructionism" puts the North East Asian region and the entire world at risk.

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US Extends License Authorizing Payment of Taxes, Import Duties to Russia March 7, 2023

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - The United States has extended a license authorizing the payment of taxes and import duties to Russia on March 7, 2023, the US Treasury Department said on Monday.

"... U.S. persons, or entities owned or controlled, directly or indirectly, by a U.S. person, are authorized to pay taxes, fees, or import duties, ..., provided such transactions are ordinarily incident and necessary to the day-to-day operations in the Russian Federation of such U.S. persons or entities, through 12:01 a.m. eastern standard time, March 7, 2023."

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US to Propose UNSC Presidential Statement to Hold DPRK Accountable for Missile Tests-Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, November 21 (Sputnik) – The United States is planning to propose a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) presidential statement in order to hold North Korea accountable for missile launches, US Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield said on Monday.

"We will offer another opportunity for the council to hold the DPRK [the Democratic People's Republic of Korea] accountable for its dangerous rhetoric and its destabilizing actions. The United States will be proposing a presidential statement to this end," Thomas-Greenfield said during a Security Council meeting. "We're prepared to take our colleagues up on their assertion that they would have considered a PRST [presidential statement] following the DPRK's March 24 ICBM [intercontinental ballistic missile] launch."

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US Officials on Global Tour to Promote Tighter Sanctions Enforcement on Russia - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is sending US officials around the world in a discreet effort to push tighter enforcement of sanctions and trade controls on Russia's major economic partners, the Wall Street Journal reported on Monday.

The US is sending senior officials to foreign capitals with the goal of sharing intelligence on sanctions evasion networks, threatening reluctant authorities and firms with consequences and gathering information on networks suspected of transporting goods into Russia, the report said, citing administration officials.

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen addressed the matter with G20 counterparts during the summit in Bali last week, the report said. Deputy Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo traveled to Brussels, London and Paris earlier this month, and assistant secretary for terror finance and financial crimes, Elizabeth Rosenberg, was recently in Japan as part of the same effort, the report said.

A number of other officials from the departments of Treasury, State and Commerce also traveled around the world with the same mission in mind, the report added.

So-called "sanctions leakage," in which inadequate sanctions enforcement enables restricted trade, is undermining the campaign of the US and its allies to impose economic consequences on Russia over its special military operation in Ukraine, the report said, citing senior Western officials.

Although exports to Russia from many of the world's largest economies dropped by more than 50% following sanctions imposed in late February, exports to Russia from many of these countries – including US allies – are now recovering, according to a Wall Street Journal trade data analysis.

South Korean and Japanese exports to Russia have recovered nearly one-third of their losses, the report said. Western officials and some senior compliance officers are concerned that banks in Austria, the Czech Republic, and Switzerland are taking a relaxed approach to sanctions enforcement, the report also said.

Exports from China to Russia are larger than when sanctions were first imposed by the US and its allies, the report said. US officials are concerned that China will supply Russia with the funds and goods needed to continue their operation in Ukraine, the report said.

Moreover, exports to Russia from Turkey were up approximately 25% at the end of the second quarter from before sanctions, and recent data shows that they have risen further since, the report said.

Earlier this month, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that most of the world continues to cooperate with Russia based on their "core national interests" despite the Western sanctions regime.

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NASA's Orion Spacecraft Makes Moon Flyby

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - The Orion spacecraft has passed around the far side of the moon, reaching about 81 miles (130 kilometers) from its surface and completing a key step in NASA's mission to return astronauts there, the space agency announced on Monday. "Orion re-acquired signal with NASA's Deep Space Network, at 7:59 a.m. EST after successfully performing the outbound powered flyby burn at 7:44 a.m. EST with a firing of the orbital

maneuvering system engine for 2 minutes and 30 seconds to accelerate the spacecraft at a rate of more than 580 mph," NASA said in a statement.

At the time of the burn, Orion was about 328 miles (530 km) above the Moon, but flight controllers did not know if it had been completed successfully until the capsule emerged from behind the moon.

"Shortly after the burn, Orion passed 81 miles above the Moon, traveling at 5,102 mph. At the time of the lunar flyby, Orion was more than 230,000 miles from Earth," the statement added. The unmanned Artemis 1 mission is key step toward NASA's goal of crewed lunar flights of the Orion spacecraft, with the first of them, Artemis 2, scheduled to launch in 2024. Artemis 2 is expected to be the first manned lunar mission since Apollo 17 in 1972, which is the most recent time people landed on the Moon.

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Major US Union Votes Down National Rail Agreement - Union

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) One of the two largest rail unions in the United States, SMART-TD, has voted to reject a national rail agreement, raising the possibility of a strike starting December 9, according to a press release on Monday.

"SMART-TD members with their votes have spoken, it's now back to the bargaining table for our operating craft members," said SMART-TD President Jeremy Ferguson. "This can all be settled through negotiations and without a strike. A settlement would be in the best interests of the workers, the railroads, shippers and the American people."

SMART-TD train and engine service members on Sunday voted down the tentative agreement with Class I railroads from September 15, while yardmaster members upheld it. Members of the other major rail union, BLET, also ratified the agreement. The two unions comprise half of the unionized workforce on the major freight railroads.

The five-year agreement in question addresses rates of pay, health and welfare, and other fringe benefits for approximately 24,000 locomotive engineers and other rail workers.

Representatives from SMART-TD will now return to the bargaining table with the National Carriers Conference Committee, which represents railroad management, to negotiate new terms for its train and engine service members.

A status quo agreement between SMART TD and management is in effect until December 8. Beginning on December 9, SMART-TD would be allowed to go on strike or the rail carriers would be permitted to lock out workers — unless Congress intervenes.

If there is a strike by SMART-TD or any of the other three rail unions that have rejected proposed contracts with the carriers, BLET and the other eight rail unions that have ratified agreements have pledged to lawfully honor their picket lines.

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Fewer Americans Support Strict Gun Control Laws – Poll

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) – Fewer Americans, although still a majority, support stricter gun laws since the summer, according to a Gallup poll released Monday. The poll, conducted from October 3 to October 20, found that 57% of Americans would like stricter US gun laws, specifically regarding the sale of firearms. This is a decrease from 66% in June, following prominent mass shootings in Uvalde and Buffalo in the spring. Aside from a loss in momentum over time, Gallup also suggested that the drop could reflect an acknowledgment of the federal gun law that was passed in June in direct response to the Uvalde shooting. At the same time, the 57% is still higher than the 52% reported a year earlier in October 2021. The recent poll also found that 32% of Americans support the gun law status quo, and 10% want the laws to be less strict. Views continued to fall along partisan lines, with 86% of Democrats and 27% of Republicans supporting stricter gun laws.

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Biden Declares Emergency in New York State Due to Severe Winter Storm – White House

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden has approved an emergency declaration in the state of New York due to a severe winter storm that struck the region last week, the White House said in a statement on Monday. “Last night, President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. declared that an emergency exists in the State of New York and ordered Federal assistance to supplement State and local response efforts due to the emergency conditions resulting from a severe winter storm and snowstorm beginning on November 18, 2022, and continuing,” the statement said. Massive snowstorm hit the western parts of New York state, particularly in neighborhoods near Buffalo, where 77 inches (1.96 meters) of snowfall were recorded, according to local media. Biden’s declaration authorizes the Department of Homeland Security and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to coordinate all disaster relief efforts, the White House said. It also allows for the provision of emergency aid and the mobilization of equipment and resources to the local population, the White House added.

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FBI's Cyber Agents to Provide Mentorship to Thai Counterparts - White House

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - The United States will establish a 90-day temporary duty assignment for cyber agents to provide mentorship to their Thai counterparts, the White House said in a fact sheet on Vice President Kamala Harris' trip to the Asian country. The announcement is part of the new US-led initiatives to strengthen the US-Thailand alliance. "Establishing a Cybercrime Mentoring Program: The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) will establish a 90-day Temporary Duty assignment for Cyber Special Agents to work with the Royal Thai Police's (RTP) Cyber Crime Investigation Bureau. This will provide mentorship and assessment of cyber investigation capabilities, cybersecurity, and cyber forensic needs," the statement said. Harris attended the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) leaders' conference in Bangkok on Friday and will also attend on Saturday, where she is expected to reaffirm US economic leadership in the region and lay out the key principles the Biden administration thinks should guide APEC economies and rally other economies around its rules-based international economic order, the official said.

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Biden to Hold 80th Birthday Brunch as First Octogenarian US President - White House

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden will celebrate his 80th birthday by holding a brunch on Sunday as the United States' first octogenarian leader, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said.

"The First Lady [Jill Biden] is going to be having a brunch on Sunday for the president to celebrate the president's birthday with his family," Jean-Pierre said during a press briefing on Friday.

Biden will become the first octogenarian to hold the office of the president of the United States when he turns 80-years-old on Sunday. Former US President Ronald Reagan was 77 upon leaving office and Donald Trump was 74.

Biden was the oldest person inaugurated in the office, taking the presidential oath at the age of 78. Biden has yet to confirm whether he intends to run for reelection in 2024.

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Trump Says 'Won't Partake' in Special Counsel Investigation, Calling it Politicized

(Update: adds Greene's, White House's reactions in paras 4-5)

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump said he would "not partake" in the newly created Special Counsel probe into his handling of classified documents and the transition of power to his successor, calling it "the worst politicization of justice in our country."

"I have been going through this for six years – for six years I have been going through this, and I am not going to go through it anymore," Trump told Fox News on Friday. "It is unfair to the

country, to the Republican Party, and I don't think people should accept it. I am not going to accept it."

US Attorney General Merrick Garland earlier on Friday announced that he appointed a special counsel, Jack Smith, to help determine whether charges are warranted in the two cases. Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene said on Friday that Republican lawmakers must refuse to appropriate funding to the special counsel and defund any part of the Justice Department "acting on behalf of the Democrat party" to advance their 2024 presidential prospects. White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre denied that Biden had any advanced knowledge of the special counsel's appointment and allegations that the administration politicizes the Justice Department.

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Oil Prices Hit 6-Week Lows, Losing as Much 10% on Week Amid China COVID-19 Woes

NEW YORK, November 19 (Sputnik) - Crude prices hit 6-week lows Friday, ending the week as much as 10% lower, as oil bulls faced a perfect storm from an explosion of COVID-19 cases in China, a fresh hawkish tilt by the Federal Reserve and easing supply worries.

The front-month December contract for the US crude benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) settled at \$80.08 a barrel, down \$1.56, or 1.9%, on the day. December WTI remained well below the \$80 support level for much of the day, hitting a 6-week low of \$87.62, before paring losses just before the close.

December WTI also traded at a discount to the January 2023 contract at one point, resulting in a market dynamic called "contango." While the discount itself was meager, it represented a structural oil market weakness where buyers wishing to hold a position in WTI at the time of contract expiry would pay more to switch to a new front-month contract.

WTI aside, the front-month January contract in Brent, the global oil benchmark, settled at \$87.62 a barrel, down \$2.16, or 2.4%. Like WTI, January Brent was also at a contango to February Brent earlier. January Brent hit an intraday low of \$85.81 earlier.

"Oil prices are continuing to retreat against the backdrop of increasingly gloomy economic prospects and surging Covid cases in China which risk further restrictions and lockdowns, threatening demand in the world's second-largest economy," Craig Erlam, analyst at online trading platform OANDA, said.

China is battling coronavirus outbreaks in numerous major cities, including Chongqing and the capital Beijing, while it takes steps to try to ease the burden of its strict zero-COVID policy, which has caused severe economic damage and widespread frustration nearly three years into the pandemic.

Several Chinese refiners have asked Saudi Aramco to reduce December-loading crude oil volumes, two sources close to the matter told Reuters, as COVID-19 restrictions and a faltering economy have weakened fuel demand in the world's biggest oil importer. The refiners had reportedly sought to trim supplies for December by about half of the previous month's level.

With Brent having broken below the psychological \$90 mark and WTI at under \$80, Erlam also wondered much this would test the "patience of OPEC+" - the global oil producing alliance that decided from this month to cut 2 million barrels per day from the collective output of the 23 countries in its coalition.

Erlam noted that OPEC+ was severely criticized for the production cut by the Biden administration and the Paris-based International Energy Agency, which represents oil consuming countries. Yet the alliance's efforts came to nothing in terms of price support. OPEC+'s motive was to offset constant worries about oil demand that had crept up in recent months as global economies sent off recession signals from runaway inflation in the aftermath of the pandemic. Crude prices hit 14-year highs in March, with Brent just shy of \$140 and WTI tipping just over \$130. By September though, Brent had fallen to around \$82 and WTI to around \$76.

The OPEC+ ordered production cuts sent Brent up again almost \$100 two weeks ago and WTI reached above \$93.

But COVID-19 headlines out of China zapped the rebound, driving both benchmarks forcefully lower over the past fortnight.

Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis President James Bullard - one of the US central bank's biggest policy hawks - also added to the bearish pressure on oil this week by saying that inflation remains "unacceptably high" for the Fed to ditch high rate hikes in favor of only smaller increases.

Some of the geopolitical risk that sent oil higher earlier this year, specifically the Ukraine conflict, has also eased of late. For instance, Poland and NATO concluded on Wednesday that a missile that crashed inside Poland was probably a stray fired by Ukraine's air defenses and not a Russian strike, easing fears that the conflict between Russia and Ukraine was spilling across the border.

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US Providing Up to \$20Mln for 'Grain From Ukraine' Initiative - Statement

UNITED NATIONS, November 19 (Sputnik) - The United States will donate up to \$20 million to the "Grain from Ukraine" initiative through the US Agency for International Development, the US Embassy in Kiev said in a statement.

"The United States, through the US Agency for International Development (USAID), is providing up to \$20 million for the 'Grain from Ukraine' initiative, announced by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the G20 Summit earlier this week, to help feed people around the world facing staggering levels of food insecurity," the statement said on Friday.

USAID will provide the additional aid via the World Food Program (WFP), the statement added. The United States is a big donor to the WFP and has so far sent \$173 million in support of the initiative.

On Thursday, the United Nations-brokered agreement for safe export of Ukrainian and Russia grain and fertilizer via the Black Sea was extended before expiring on November 19.

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Blinken to Visit World Cup in Qatar Joined by Mexican, Canadian Officials - US State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will attend the FIFA World Cup in Qatar and will be joined by Qatari, Mexican and Canadian government officials, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Educational and Cultural Affairs Stacy White said during a press briefing.

"On Monday in Doha, we'll bring sports diplomacy to the forefront as part of Secretary Blinken's visit to the World Cup. He will be joined at a youth soccer clinic by Qatari government officials, the foreign secretary of Mexico, and the Minister of International Development of Canada," White said on Friday.

In addition, US Soccer President Cindy Cone will also participate and accompany Blinken during his visit to that clinic, White added.

Blinken will travel to Qatar on November 21-22 to launch the fifth annual US-Qatar Strategic Dialogue and meet with the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed Bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani to celebrate the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries, according to the State Department.

Qatar is the first country in the Arab world with a majority Muslim population that will host the FIFA World Cup. The tournament is scheduled to be held from November 20 to December 18.

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Biden Not Given Advance Notice of Garland Decision to Name Special Counsel - White House
WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden was not given advance notice of US Attorney General Merrick Garland's decision to appoint a special counsel in two probes related to former President Donald Trump, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said.

"No, [Biden] was not aware, we were not aware... We were not given advance notice,"

Jean-Pierre said during a press briefing on Friday.

Earlier in the day, Garland announced the appointment of Jack Smith as special counsel in probes into the possible attempts by Trump to overturn the results of the 2020 US presidential election and Trump's handling of classified documents from his time in office.

Jean-Pierre did not provide Biden's reaction to the appointment and referred all questions on the matter to the Justice Department.

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US Delegation Has No Plans to Meet With Taliban Officials While in Qatar – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) – The United States delegation led by Secretary of State Antony Blinken has no plans to meet with any Taliban (under UN sanctions over terrorism) officials while in Doha, Qatar for the World Cup, which the country is hosting this year, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs Daniel Benaim said during a press briefing. "We do not have any plans," Benaim said on Friday when asked whether the US delegation is planning to meet with the Taliban.

Blinken will travel to Qatar on November 21-22 to launch the fifth annual US-Qatar Strategic Dialogue and meet with the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed Bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani to celebrate the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the countries, Benaim added.

Qatar mediated the talks between the Taliban and the United States, which ended in a peace agreement on the complete withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan. The withdrawal of US troops was completed in August 2021.

Qatar is the first country in the Arab world with a majority Muslim population that will host the FIFA World Cup. The tournament is scheduled to be held from November 20 to December 18.

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Trump Says 'Won't Partake' in Special Counsel Investigation, Calling it Politicized

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump said he would "not partake" in the newly created Special Counsel probe into his handling of classified documents and the transition of power to his successor, calling it "the worst politicization of justice in our country."

"I have been going through this for six years — for six years I have been going through this, and I am not going to go through it anymore," Trump told Fox News on Friday. "It is unfair to the country, to the Republican Party, and I don't think people should accept it. I am not going to accept it."

US Attorney General Merrick Garland earlier on Friday announced that he appointed a special counsel to help determine whether charges are warranted in the two cases.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) -

EXECUTION OF RUSSIAN SOLDIERS IN UKRAINE

- * The Ukrainian military deliberately killed more than ten captured Russian servicemen, shooting them in the head at point blank range - a crime no one can present as a "tragic exception," the Russian Defense Ministry said on Friday.
- * Russia demands that international organizations condemn the execution of Russian prisoners of war by the Ukrainian military and conduct a thorough investigation, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.
- * Russia's Permanent Representative to the United Nations' Geneva Office Gennady Gatilov called the shooting of Russian prisoners of war by the Ukrainian military a war crime.
- * Russian ombudswoman Tatyana Moskalkova said she addressed the Council of Europe Secretary-General, the OSCE/ODIHR director and the head of the Council of Europe committee with a demand to condemn the execution of Russian prisoners of war by the Ukrainian military.
- * The UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR) is studying the video depicting murdered Russian prisoners in Ukraine, OHCHR spokeswoman Elizabeth Throssell told Sputnik.

IRAN NUCLEAR AGREEMENT

- * The next round of consultations between the IAEA and Iran should take place in Tehran before the end of the month, Mikhail Ulyanov, Russia's permanent representative to international organizations in Vienna, said on Friday.
- * The Iranian nuclear deal is not on the United States' agenda at the moment when Iranian drones are "raining down" on Ukrainian cities and when Tehran is "brutalizing" its own people, US Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Colin Kahl said.

GLOBAL ENERGY MARKETS

- * The Group of Seven is planning to announce the level of their price cap on Russian crude oil next Wednesday, Bloomberg reported on Friday, citing people familiar with the matter.
- * Russia and China increased trade turnover in the energy sector by 64% in monetary terms and by 10% in physical terms this year, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said.
- * Russian energy giant Gazprom said that it launched gas deliveries to Azerbaijan under a new agreement with the country's state company SOCAR on November 15.

WESTERN AID TO UKRAINE

- * The Biden administration is working with Congress to secure more funding for Ukraine, White House National Security Council Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said on Friday.
- * The Pentagon is seeking to identify possible sources of artillery data systems to use with High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS) in Ukraine, Latvia and Taiwan, according to an official US government contract notice.
- * Canada in late November will issue a five-year, C\$500 million (\$373.7 million) government-backed bond to raise money for Ukraine, the country's central bank announced.

RUSSIAN ECONOMY

- * The decline of the Russia's GDP in 2022 will be 2.8-3%, and next year the decline will not exceed 1%, the head of the Russian delegation at the APEC summit, First Deputy Prime Minister Andrei Belousov said on Friday.

- * Russia has already passed the lower point of decline in terms of consumer demand and the lower limit for investment is already close, Belousov said.
- * The impact of the global recession on Russia's foreign trade will be minimal due to sanctions against Moscow, Belousov said.

PUTIN-ERDOGAN TALKS

- * Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in a telephone conversation discussed the initiative to create a large gas hub in Turkey, the Kremlin said on Friday.
- * Putin and Erdogan underscored the importance of comprehensive and full implementation of the grain deal, given its recent extension, the Kremlin said.
- * Erdogan and Putin discussed over the telephone bilateral relations between Turkey and Moscow, the issue of the grain corridor, as well as the importance of peace negotiations between Russia and Ukraine, Erdogan's office said.
- * Erdogan told Putin during a phone conversation about plans for work on the evaluation of the gas hub project proposed by Russia, the Turkish leader's office said.

US-RUSSIA NEGOTIATIONS

- * Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov said on Friday that he does not rule out new contacts with the United States at a higher level after the meeting in Cairo on the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START).
- * Russia and the United States will continue contacts to solve problems related to issuing of visas, Ryabkov said.

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Canadian Intelligence Investigating Death Threats From Iran to People in Canada - Reports TORONTO, November 18 (Sputnik) - The Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) is investigating "credible" death threats from Iran toward individuals living in Canada, CBC reported on Friday.

"CSIS is actively investigating several threats to life emanating from the Islamic Republic of Iran based on credible intelligence," CSIS spokesperson Eric Balsam was quoted by the broadcaster as saying.

CSIS is aware of Iranian state actors monitoring and intimidating people inside Canada to silence those who speak out against the government, the report said.

It is the first time the intelligence agency has confirmed investigations involving lethal threats from Iran toward people located in Canada, according to the report.

The alleged "hostile activities and foreign interference" undermine Canadian security, sovereignty and democratic values, Balsam also reportedly said.

On Wednesday, UK intelligence said that they believe Iran is targeting dissidents abroad that they perceive as enemies of the regime, the report said.

Over the past two months, protests have been going on in Iran and elsewhere around the world, including in Canada, in response to the death of 22-year old Mahsa Amini in police custody. The government claims Amini died of a heart attack while demonstrators claim she was beaten by authorities.

CSIS urges people in Canada who believe they are being targeted by Iran to contact law enforcement, the report said.

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US Increases Reward for Information About Al-Shabaab Leaders – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 18 (Sputnik) - The United States is increasing its reward for information that would help identify and locate key leaders of the al-Shabaab terrorist group (affiliated with al-Qaeda, banned in Russia), the State Department said on Friday.

"The US Department of State's Rewards for Justice (RFJ) program, which is administered by the Diplomatic Security Service, is increasing its reward offers to up to \$10 million each for information leading to the identification or location of al-Shabaab key leaders Ahmed Diriye, Mahad Karate, and Jihad Mostafa," the statement read.

This program is also offering a reward of up to \$10 million for information leading to the disruption of the financial mechanisms of al-Shabaab, it added.

Diriye has been al-Shabaab's emir since September 2014. The US designated him in 2015, and the UN Security Council included him in its sanctions list in 2014, according to the statement.

"He was seen in a video meeting with al-Shabaab fighters prior to the January 2020 attack on Camp Simba in Manda Bay, Kenya, that killed one US Army soldier and two US contract personnel and wounded three additional US personnel and one Kenyan soldier," the State Department said.

Mahad Karate, who continues to lead Al-Shabaab operations, was designated in 2015.

Jihad Mostafa is a US citizen, who served as a military instructor at al-Shabaab training camps. He is also a leader of foreign fighters, along with al-Shabaab's media wing, the statement added. "The FBI assesses Mostafa to be the highest-ranking terrorist with U.S. citizenship fighting overseas," it said.

Al-Shabaab has been waging an armed struggle against the government of Somalia for over a decade and is controlling large areas in the southern and central parts of the country.

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US Attorney General Garland Appoints Special Counsel in Two Probes Involving Trump
(Adds special counsel statement, details in paras 5-8)

WASHINGTON, November 18 (Sputnik) - US Attorney General Merrick Garland announced on Friday that he appointed a special counsel to help determine whether charges are warranted in two cases linked to former President Donald Trump.

"I'm here today to announce the appointment of a special counsel in connection with two ongoing criminal investigations that have received significant public attention," Garland said during a press conference. "Today, I signed an order appointing Jack Smith to serve as special counsel ... Smith is a veteran, career prosecutor."

The special counsel will conduct parts of the investigations into whether any person or entity unlawfully interfered with the transfer of power following the 2020 presidential election and into the handling of classified documents and records by Trump, Garland said. The appointment of a special counsel underscores the Justice Department's commitment to both independence and accountability on particularly sensitive matters, Garland also said.

The appointment was made in response to both Trump and sitting US President Joe Biden prospectively running for the office again in 2024, Garland added.

Smith is a former Justice Department prosecutor and former chief prosecutor in The Hague, where he investigated alleged war crimes in Kosovo, Garland said.

"I intend to conduct the assigned investigations, and any prosecution that may result from them, independently and in the best traditions of the Department of Justice," Smith said on Friday in a statement on his appointment.

Smith said the probes will not slow down under his watch.

Trump has been the subject of investigations into alleged efforts to undermine the 2020 presidential outcome through the January 6 US Capitol riot, as well as into whether he mishandled classified documents from his presidency, which resulted in a federal raid on his Mar-a-Lago residence earlier this year.

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UPDATE - US Recommends Immunity for Mohammed bin Salman in Khashoggi Lawsuit – State Dept.

(Adds details in paras 5-6)

WASHINGTON, November 18 (Sputnik) - The US State Department determines that Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman should be granted immunity in a US lawsuit brought against him by the fiancée of murdered journalist Jamal Khashoggi, according to a letter.

"The State Department recognizes and allows the immunity of Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman as a sitting head of government of a foreign state," the letter stated, asking the Department of Justice to recommend immunity to the US district court.

The final decision will be made by Judge John D. Bates, who had asked the US government to file a statement of interest about the applicability of head-of-state immunity, among other issues. The State Department said the determination did not imply a view on the merits of the lawsuit and reiterated its "unequivocal condemnation of the heinous murder."

Later in the day, State Department spokesperson Vedant Patel defended the decision to allow the immunity for the Saudi prime minister as the "normal practice" of the US government that has been applied across many past US administrations with respect to a number of foreign leaders, including President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in Haiti in 1993, President Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe in 2001, Prime Minister Narendra Modi in India in 2014, and President Joseph Kabila in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2018.

Patel added that he agrees with National Security Council spokesman John Kirby's assessment of the bilateral relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia as tense.

Khashoggi was strangled and dismembered in October 2018 by a team of Saudi agents inside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, where he was lured to complete paperwork for his upcoming marriage to Turkish citizen Hatice Cengiz. US intelligence found that the crown prince, who became the prime minister in September, had approved an operation in Istanbul to capture and kill Khashoggi.

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The special counsel will conduct parts of the investigations into whether any person or entity unlawfully interfered with the transfer of power following the 2020 presidential election and into the handling of classified documents and records by Trump, Garland said. The appointment of a special counsel underscores the Justice Department's commitment to both independence and accountability on particularly sensitive matters, Garland also said.

The appointment was made in response to both Trump and sitting US President Joe Biden prospectively running for the office again in 2024, Garland added.

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Musk Says Twitter to Promote Free Speech But Limit Reach of 'Hate Tweets' on Platform

WASHINGTON, November 18 (Sputnik) - Twitter will promote the principle of free speech but limit the reach of negative or hateful content on the social media platform, Twitter chief Elon Musk said on Friday.

"New Twitter policy is freedom of speech, but not freedom of reach. Negative/hate tweets will be max deboosted and demonetized, so no ads or other revenue to twitter," Musk said via Twitter. Users won't find deboosted tweets unless they specifically seek them out, Musk said. The deboost will only apply to individual tweets and not whole accounts, Musk also said. Additionally, Twitter reinstated the accounts of comedian Kathy Griffin, psychologist Jordan Peterson and satirical news outlet Babylon Bee, Musk said. However, when a user suggested Twitter reinstate the account of conspiracy theorist Alex Jones, Musk simply replied, "No." Musk, who recently acquired Twitter for \$44 billion, said he planned to bolster protections for free speech on the platform. Last month, Musk said Twitter would form a "content moderation council" with diverse viewpoints to help govern the platform's policies.

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UN Secretary-General Condemns North Korea for Latest Missile Test Launch - Statement

UNITED NATIONS, November 18 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres condemns North Korea's latest ballistic missile test launch, the Office of the United Nations Spokesperson said in a statement on Friday.

Earlier in the day, North Korea test-launched one of the most powerful intercontinental ballistic missiles, which reportedly can reach the United States' mainland.

"The Secretary-General strongly condemns the launch of yet another ballistic missile of intercontinental range by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," the statement said. Guterres reiterated his calls on North Korea to desist from taking any further provocative actions and fully comply with its international obligations under all relevant UN Security Council resolutions as well as to take immediate steps to resume dialogue leading to sustainable peace and the complete and verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, the statement added. The launch came a day after North Korea fired a short-range ballistic missile toward the Sea of Japan and warned the United States and its allies that it would respond proportionally to Washington's bolstering of extended deterrence.

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US Attorney General Garland to Name Special Counsel in Trump Criminal Probe - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 18 (Sputnik) - US Attorney General Merrick Garland is expected to appoint a special counsel to determine whether former President Donald Trump should be charged in connection with Justice Department probes, the Wall Street Journal reported on Friday.

Garland is expected to announce the special counsel Friday afternoon, just three days after Trump formally announced his 2024 presidential campaign, the report said, citing a person familiar with the matter.

The identity of the special counsel and the exact scope of his or her work is not known at this time, the report said.

Garland is scheduled to make a public statement at 2:15 p.m. ET (17:15 GMT), according to the Justice Department.

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Biden Asks Supreme Court to Vacate Lower Court Ruling, Revive Student Debt Relief - Filing

WASHINGTON, November 18 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration on Friday filed an application with the US Supreme Court to vacate the ruling of a lower court and lift an injunction blocking enforcement of a plan to forgive a limited amount of student loan debt.

In September, six states challenged the Department of Education's plan to forgive up to \$20,000 in student debt depending on a borrower's circumstances. Earlier this month, the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals granted the states' request for a universal injunction on implementing the plan pending appeal of the case.

"This Court should vacate that injunction. Respondents lack standing to challenge the plan. On the merits, the plan falls squarely within the plain text of the [Secretary of Education's] statutory authority," the Biden administration said in the filing. "The Eighth Circuit's erroneous injunction leaves millions of economically vulnerable borrowers in limbo, uncertain about the size of their debt and unable to make financial decisions with an accurate understanding of their future repayment obligations."

The Biden administration contended in the filing that the Eighth Circuit failed to issue its injunction using the typical standard: whether the case is "likely to succeed on the merits." The government believes it is likely to succeed on the merits of their case, the filing said.

The court should, at a minimum, narrow the injunction pending appeal of the case, the filing added.

If the Supreme Court declines to vacate the injunction, it may consider the application a petition to take up the case, the filing said. The court may want to set the case for expedited briefing and argument this term to avoid prolonging uncertainty for borrowers, the filing also said.

Postponing review until the Eighth Circuit enters judgment would likely delay resolution of the case until sometime in 2024, the filing said.

The application to the Supreme Court was submitted by US Solicitor General Elizabeth Prelogar.

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Canadian Officials Dodge Dialogue Fearing 'Uncomfortable Questions' – Russian Embassy

WASHINGTON, November 18 (Sputnik) - The Canadian government refrains from engaging in bilateral dialogue with Russia because it fears having to answer uncomfortable questions, the Russian Embassy told Sputnik.

The last official contact between Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and his Canadian counterpart, Melanie Joly, took place in December 2021, at the 28th OSCE Ministerial Meeting Council in Stockholm.

"To our understanding, the reason is simple. The Canadian officials are afraid of conversation with us because they would have to respond to uncomfortable questions," the embassy said. Notably, the embassy questioned the decision of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to involve Canada in training fighters from the Neo-Nazi "Azov" regiment, thus turning a blind eye to the crimes perpetrated by them against civilians in Donbas.

"Why does it close eyes on war crimes carried out by the Kiev regime," the embassy added. Furthermore, considering Canada's history, notably its French-speaking province of Quebec, it should have shared its experience with Ukraine in terms of bilingualism, the Russian embassy continued.

Russia does not understand how Ottawa instead opted for endorsing the "genocide of Ukraine's Russian speaking population," the ban of their native language, the embassy added.

Since Russia began its special military operation in Ukraine, diplomatic relations between Moscow and Ottawa have fallen to a new historic low level. Canada has imposed a vast array of sanctions against Russia and its allies, notably Belarus and Ukrainian "facilitators" of the Russian military operation, and has provided billions worth of military and financial aid to Kiev.

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US Issues License Allowing Certain Transactions With VEON Telecommunication - Treasury

WASHINGTON, November 18 (Sputnik) - The United States has issued a license allowing certain transactions regarding debt and equity securities of the telecommunication company VEON, the US Department of the Treasury said on Friday.

"Except as provided in paragraph (b) of this general license, all transactions ordinarily incident and necessary to the purchase or receipt of any debt or equity securities of VEON Ltd. that are prohibited by section 1(a)(i) of Executive Order (E.O.) 14071 are authorized, provided that the debt or equity securities were issued prior to June 6, 2022," the license said.

The license does not authorize any transactions otherwise prohibited by the Russian Harmful Foreign Activities Sanctions Regulations (RuHSR), the Treasury department said.

The prohibitions include transactions involving any person blocked pursuant to the RuHSR, unless separately authorized, the Treasury Department added.

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UNSC Does Not Reflect Number of African States, Role in Global Affairs - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, November 18 (Sputnik) - The composition of the UN Security Council does not reflect the number of states in Africa nor the continent's role on the global stage, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said on Friday.

"Africa's representation on the Security Council at present matches neither the total number of states on the continent, nor the role that African plays in international affairs," Nebenzia told the UN General Assembly.

The Russian ambassador also said that other worthy candidates for a seat on the UN Security Council are Brazil and India.

The debate at the UN General Assembly concerned a possible reform of the UN Security Council of its enlargement. The UN Security Council consists of five permanent members (P5) who hold veto power and ten non-permanent members elected for a two-year term.

On Thursday, UN General Assembly President Csaba Korosi said negotiations among the 193 states have never produced a result that should have been consulted with the five permanent members on the UN Security Council. Korosi noted that United Nations members have to iron out an acceptable compromise for all on the matter.

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US, Irish Diplomats Visit Convicted Spy Paul Whelan in Russian Prison - Statement

WASHINGTON, November 18 (Sputnik) - Irish and US diplomats visited earlier this week convicted spy Paul Whelan in a prison in Russia where he is serving his sentence, the Whelan family said in a statement on Friday.

"Paul was visited by Irish and US Embassy consular staff Wednesday (11/16). They made the drive out to Mordovia as they have repeatedly since he was transferred to IK-17 over two years go," the statement said.

Whelan was also able to call his parents on Thursday and described how he is coping in prison, the statement said.

"Paul told our parents he's picked up a few Russian words, as well as a few in Tajik and the languages of other prisoners at IK-17. Social grease and a survival resource," the statement said.

The Whelan family suggested that an exchange of prisoners between the United States and Russia is one of three potential outcomes for Paul.

"Another is that the governments can't find common ground and nothing happens. And the third is what happened last April, when Paul was left behind," the statement said.

Whelan is serving a 16-year prison sentence on espionage charges for which he was sentenced in June 2020.

Earlier on Friday, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov said that Russian businessman Viktor Bout was considered and discussed as a person for a possible prisoner exchange.

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US Looking for IT and Communication System for US Embassy in Ukraine - Statement

WASHINGTON, November 18 (Sputnik) - The United States is looking for an IT and communication system for the US Embassy Ukraine, according to the notice, which appeared on the System for Award Management (SAM) on Friday.

"The U.S. Consulate General, Frankfurt provides the following Pre-Solicitation Notice regarding the issuance of a Request for Quotes (RFQ) for: IT and Communication system for communications centers for the U.S. Embassy Ukraine as described below, to be awarded during the last quarter of calendar year 2022," the statement said.

The US Embassy in Kiev has increased its number of personnel, which now stands in the dozens.

On February 24, Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine after the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics requested help to defend them from intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special military o

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US Looking for Administrative Support for Chernobyl Projects in Ukraine - Statement

WASHINGTON, November 18 (Sputnik) - The United States is looking for administrative support for Chernobyl projects in Ukraine, according to the notice, which appeared on the System for Award Management (SAM) on Friday.

"Administrative Support for Chernobyl Projects in Ukraine. The proposed contract action is for supplies or services for which the Government intends to solicit and negotiate with only one source, the Science and Technology Center in Ukraine, under the authority of FAR 6.302-1. Interested persons may identify their interest and capability to respond to the requirement," the statement said.

The explosion at the Chernobyl NPP in Soviet Ukraine took place in the early hours of April 26, 1986. Nearly 3,000 square miles of territory in northern Ukraine and parts of Belarus were depopulated, with 1,000 square miles considered an exclusion zone due to elevated levels of radiation. The Chernobyl disaster is widely considered the worst nuclear accident in history. An international outcry over a two-day delay before authorities publicly announced the accident is credited in part with inspiring an era of glasnost (openness) initiated by Gorbachev.

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US Congressman Jeffries Asks Colleagues to Support His US House Democrat Leadership Bid

WASHINGTON, November 18 (Sputnik) - US Congressman Hakeem Jeffries on Friday sent a letter to his Democratic Party colleagues on asking them to support his candidacy for the position of House Minority Leader in the new Congress in January.

"Today, I write to humbly ask for your support for the position of House Democratic Leader as we once again prepare to meet the moment," Jeffries said in the letter.

The congressman from New York said one of the top priorities for Democrats in the House of Representatives should be to retake the majority in the lower chamber of Congress as early as November 2024.

Jeffries said he is hopeful to find common ground where possible with his Republican colleagues, but at the same time accused them of having "no plan to accomplish anything meaningful."

The letter was sent on the next day after US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said that she will not seek reelection for the party leadership position in the next Congress after the Democrats lost control of the lower chamber in the midterm elections.